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Explosives Shipped Libyan Case Opens Door to Intrigue

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NEW ORLEANS—At daybreak an 18-wheel semitrailer truck escorted by two Louisiana state troopers groaned down a narrow gravel road to an old brick explosive magazine deep in a mangrove swamp.

The state troopers were there to supervise the loading of 7,500 pounds of C4 plastic explosives and to guard the shipment as far as the Texas border, the first leg of a 2,000-mile trek to a desert bunker east of Los Angeles.

A Pomona, Calif., munitions dealer had ordered this shipment. He was amassing, at a cost of about \$300,000, all private stocks of the military surplus explosive available in the United States and Canada. The dealer claimed at the time that it would be used to simulate atomic blasts for government research projects.

Actually, the C4—ultimately 20 tons of it—was secretly bound for a Libyan arsenal to outfit a terrorist center and training school in Tripoli run by former Central Intelligence Agency agents and other Americans working for the regime of Libya's ruler, Col. Moammar Kadafi and reaping profits estimated by federal authorities to be in the millions of dollars.

Unwittingly Helped

When the Louisiana troopers pitched in to help load the 50-pound cakes of cream-colored C4, they unwittingly helped launch what federal agents now believe was the largest illegal shipment of explosives ever made by Americans to international terrorists.

A federal grand jury will hear testimony next week. The Times has learned, into how agents of Kadafi succeeded in briefly cornering the U.S. market on surplus plastic explosives and ferrying them to Libya.

The grand jury is latest in a three-year involvement of active CIA agents, Green Beret government technicians expanding role as a worldwide terrorism.

The story of this experiment is a window into international terror as iters who exploit it.

Escort Required

Protection for the load was tight that sul morning in August. Louisiana's explosive troopers were required shipment to keep it out hands. But when they waved goodbye at the there was no escort waiting in Texas—or beyond.

"No one seemed to be as concerned as we were," recalled trooper Rick Borgus. "And we told Texas it was coming."

The truckload was ultimately combined into a 20-ton inventory of C4 accumulated by the Pomona dealer, Jerome S. Brower. It would be airlifted to Libya two months later from Houston aboard a chartered DC-8 in boxes marked "drilling mud."

Already, an elaborate terrorist training school, arsenal and bomb laboratory—much of it still in operation, according to U.S. authorities—had been set up in Libya in the

servants' quarters of the Tripoli palace of former King Idris, ousted by Kadafi in 1969.

The terrorist center in Tripoli was set up in 1976 and staffed by American ex-Green Berets, retired U.S. government bomb experts and at least two civilian employees on leave from the top secret China Lake Naval Weapons Center east of Bakersfield, Calif. Authorities say they know of at least 30 Americans who have been involved.

Their skills were used for commando training in such areas as covert operations, sabotage and assassination. Their students were Libyan soldiers and Arab terrorists.

Other Americans recruited from around the U.S. by Libyan agents, worked in a bomb factory—camouflaging bombs as ash trays, lamps, flower vases, alarm clocks, refrigerators, televisions, radios, briefcases, tea kettles and candles. One of the bomb experts told a Washington grand jury in 1980 that he made a bomb to be hidden in a box of tea and given to someone as a gift.

A federal judge later told a man indicted and convicted in that case.

No one will ever know the number of people killed or maimed as a result of the explosives that were supplied—and (of technicians who assisted) in training terrorists in the use of these explosives.

One or more of the bombs killed several Libyans in the summer of 1977 and injured three American terrorist instructors.